

THE REVOLUTIONIST: EUGENE V. DEBS:
A TRANSMEDIA EXPERIENCE FOR PUBLIC MEDIA AUDIENCES

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ABSTRACT

CREATIVE PROJECT: The Revolutionist Eugene V. Debs: A Transmedia Experience for Public Media Audiences

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As digital media increases in popularity and broadcast audiences decline, it is crucial that television networks find ways to engage their users. Public media stations can determine what their audiences want and enrich storytelling through design thinking to create a transmedia experience. Design thinking allows content creators to determine users' preferred platforms and storytelling methods within a multi-platform, transmedia landscape. WFYI, a public media station in Indianapolis, produced a documentary about the socialist labor leader Eugene Debs. While creating the hour long program, an organization-wide committee and the station's young professionals group created an eleven part cross-platform media campaign to engage different audiences around the storyworld of *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs*. While the individual pieces were designed by users and content creators, a more interconnected transmedia design following the story from one platform to another may have enhanced the experience. Nevertheless, this approach of "meeting audiences where they already are" can expand the story

world from what can be told in a single broadcast hour to multiple experiences, more in-depth content, and a broader range of users.

Keywords: Transmedia, public media, design thinking, multimedia, cross-platform, digital storytelling, television, radio, social media, documentary, Eugene Debs, collaboration

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The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs: A Transmedia Experience for Public Media Audiences

The popularity of “tune-in” television is waning. On-demand options and Internet-based content have fractured the audience of broadcast’s former heyday when three or four channels dominated the airwaves. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was created in 1969 as a way for the United States government to support a non-profit educational alternative to the commercial television landscape that former Federal Communications Commission chairman Newton Minow called “a vast wasteland” (Minow, 1961). From the CPB, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was created in 1972 as a network of local public television stations, sharing content and resources across a national system. However, as the media landscape grows more vast, PBS’s broadcast impact has diminished. With hundreds of channels serving fragmented audiences and huge streaming companies creating thousands of hours of original content, the competition is fierce. (Chan-Olmstead & Kim, 2002).

Yet, public broadcasting has a unique opportunity. Many member stations are dual-license, meaning they carry both PBS television channels and National Public Radio (NPR) radio channels and therefore reach two very different groups. The typical PBS audience skews older, male, white, and conservative, while NPR audiences are younger and more liberal (Sefton, 2017). Also, because each public media station is independently operated and supported directly by local viewers and listeners through donations, they have a community tie to audience and content. In February 2019, PBS President Paula Kerger said, “Netflix is not in every community around this country. Amazon isn’t. But our stations are...The more that we can continue to focus on that unique aspect of the fact that we are a media service that lives and breathes on the

community level and that there's stuff there that they can't find on Netflix that's going to be of great value" (Nguyen, 2019). This relationship with the public and a non-profit funding model has built the perception that PBS is a trustworthy and high-quality brand. Researchers argue that it is imperative that PBS, in spite of increased commercial competition, retain its non-commercial identity as this differentiation is crucial to its future success (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002).

Public broadcasting stations may be able to leverage these strengths through the use of transmedia storytelling in their local content creation. Transmedia publication creates an in-depth, complete story through individual pieces of media across platforms (Jenkins, 2006). Transmedia storytelling does not simply reuse the same content across channels but emerges and intersects on various platforms with interlocking pieces to a complete storyworld. It is intentionally designed to expand audiences and increase engagement (Jenkins, 2006). Some PBS programs *have* successfully used transmedia. *Half The Sky*, an experience highlighting women's inequality issues, included a four-hour documentary airing on PBS, live social media engagement, web videos, music downloads, online games, and more. The creators designed the project to find audiences that would normally not watch PBS in places where they usually consume media, such as Facebook (Astle, 2012).

But good design does not just come from a clever idea. It also involves executing that idea to create an immersive experience (Brown & Katz, 2009). Furthermore, it is crucial that the design be human-centered and meet the needs and wants of the user (Norman, 2013). That's where design thinking comes in. Design thinking is an approach that finds out what users actually want by focusing on the current desires of people using the product. Content creators

must conduct empathy research, lead brainstorming sessions, and prototype various iterations of a product if they wish to develop something satisfying and innovative for their users (Brown & Katz, 2009). KQED-PBS in San Francisco is implementing these central tenets of design thinking. The station is focusing on experimentation and a user-centered approach, undergoing a culture shift from assuming the station knew what audiences wanted to using data and audience feedback (Burg, 2016).

I am a television producer at WFYI, the PBS and NPR station in Indianapolis. The majority of WFYI's past attempts at creating "cross-platform" media have focused on broadcasting the same content on television, radio, web, and social media, but have failed to use a transmedia approach. In addition, WFYI seldom works with users to find out exactly what audiences want. The typical strategy is to produce, broadcast, and hope someone watches. How might WFYI engage radio, television, and digital audiences through one locally-produced transmedia project? WFYI is currently producing a historical documentary about national socialist leader Eugene Debs for broadcast on WFYI's television channel on October 3, 2019, four months after this thesis was published. Debs led labor strikes in the late 19th century, ran for president on the socialist ticket five times, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for speaking out against World War I (Salvatore, 1982), and is a native of nearby Terre Haute, Indiana. However, most people I've talked to about Debs have only a vague recollection of learning about him in school, if they know him at all.

Because of this lack of familiarity, it is essential to present information about Debs on platforms where users already consume media in a style they prefer. Two principles of multimedia instruction demonstrate this importance of learning about a subject early and often.

First, the *pre-training principle* asserts that presenting terms and key ideas before a narrative sequence better prepares people to learn and retain the information. This not only focuses the attention of the learner on what will be important, but this intentional learning beforehand will strengthen associations and limit distraction later (Hall & Stahl, 2012). Furthermore, the *personalization principle* of multimedia learning indicates that by using conversational language, both in narration and text, a viewer is more likely to learn the information. This is because humans want to understand when they feel involved (Mayer, 2003). By using these ideas to create a transmedia production in a way that not only informs people about the upcoming documentary but teaches them about the subject matter, users will be better equipped to learn about Debs. This will involve telling different parts of the story across multiple platforms to reach potentially interested publics who do not already watch WFYI.

In addition, by using design thinking to engage the audiences WFYI will determine what users want and the best way to present each of these individual story threads so they might draw audiences across the storyworld. Through design thinking, stakeholders were asked to ideate and prototype potential transmedia vehicles for the Eugene Debs story. These users came from two groups. The first group was a “transmedia committee” of seven WFYI employees who work in television, radio, social media, community engagement, events, and marketing. The second group included four members of WFYI’s young professional group called the WFYI Nerds. I led these groups through design thinking sessions in order to co-create transmedia ideas. WFYI will then implement those ideas across several platforms, including broadcast television, radio, websites, social media, and physical spaces, to create the transmedia storyworld of Eugene Debs. By the time this paper was published, I had conducted the design thinking sessions, created

preliminary designs for the transmedia stories, and started to produce them. However, the documentary did not air, nor were the transmedia elements completed by the publication of this paper.

If this user co-created transmedia project is successful, WFYI would be able to replicate this process for future documentaries. Though each project will need to go through its own design thinking process and transmedia design, WFYI may be able to think differently about media delivery and audience engagement. This could represent a sea change for the organization and an example for other PBS affiliate stations. With increased engagement across platforms and between PBS and NPR channels, public broadcasting stations have the potential to expand their reach to larger, more diverse audiences through ever more popular digital channels. This increased breadth and depth of usership could translate to added financial support for public broadcasting stations, thus ensuring present and future success in the digital age (Knight Foundation, 2017).

Literature Review

For the Eugene Debs project, design thinking served as a crucial tool in developing a transmedia storyworld for audiences. In *Change by Design*, Tim Brown (2009) explains how design is not just coming up with an idea; design is taking that idea a step further and executing it well in order to create an experience. Experience is what drives people today to buy a product or continue using a service. Once consumers in the developed world meet their initial needs, they look for meaningful experiences in the places they live, work, and play. Users no longer want a passive consumption of media; they want to participate in creating it. Design thinking allows creators to design experiences based on empathy research so that users can be involved in the

creation process. Yet, it is difficult to get users to change in order to fit designed experiences and behaviors. Good design suggests that it is more effective to ask users to adapt behaviors they already know. In order to find out what behaviors exist and how to adapt them, it is important to first observe people and see what they do, then determine how to streamline or improve those interactions (Brown, 2009).

These tenets of design thinking are useful for media design. Experiences can be created physically and digitally, and in the case of transmedia storytelling, in both realms. First, the idea that people want to go beyond passive consumption to an active experience may seem obvious; but in the world of public television, stations rarely give them that opportunity. Therefore, engagement could increase if WFYI offers a more participatory way to learn about Eugene Debs. Second, the idea of using established behaviors is attractive. If people read wfyi.org for news, it may be interesting to include a news story from 1918 about Debs' arrest and insert it in its original format next to current headlines. Finally, allowing design thinking at all levels could be an interesting way to garner ideas for producing the documentary from colleagues and stakeholders. Also, the users themselves could contribute through design thinking *before* production so that WFYI knows what experiences are desirable.

Journalist and tech CEO Jennifer Brandel (2016) outlines the basics of design thinking based on the Stanford d.school approach, which includes these steps: *Empathize* and talk with users; *Define* the problem by combining the research; *Ideate* and brainstorm solutions; *Prototype* by building out a solution; and *Test* the prototype and analyze the results. This process is repeated as much as necessary. How do journalists use this process? The answer: currently, they don't. The majority of stories written by journalists do not get reader/audience feedback until

after publication. Even this feedback is rarely collected by or presented to the journalists creating the stories. Because of this, media outlets are wasting money and are not as effective as they could be (Brandel, 2016). The author proposes a “Public Powered Story Cycle,” and gives an example of a project she worked on at WBEZ-NPR Chicago called *Curious City*. The reporters would solicit questions from listeners, which is to *empathize*. Next, they would ask listeners to *define* what to cover. Then, the audience would *ideate* ways to answer this question through various platforms. Finally, the *prototype* and *testing* would be the reporting process, often with the listener who posed the original question along for the ride (Brandel, 2016). Brandel presents an exciting approach to user engagement through design thinking. And because it was created and implemented at an NPR station, it seems possible to replicate at WFYI. For the Eugene Debs project, it may be possible to ask for audience questions about Debs in the weeks leading up to the broadcast of the documentary on WFYI’s radio station and website.

Burg (2016) outlines KQED’s investment in design thinking and new media in his article *Investing in Innovation*. The public media station held a ten-week design thinking workshop, and then presented the staff’s ideas to the public through a “Demo Day.”. Public media companies traditionally are slow to change and adapt to innovation, and the pivot to new media has been slow for most stations. However, KQED is taking steps to leverage its trusted brand into a new media sphere by working with Matter, a media accelerator company. The goals of this partnership are to nurture young media entrepreneurs, change the perception of KQED as an old media company to a new media company, and encourage innovation through design thinking. By using design thinking, the station will focus on experimentation and a user-centered approach (Burg, 2016). But this did not come easily. KQED had to undergo a culture shift from assuming

the station knew what audiences wanted to using data. The staff was also empowered to participate and innovate at all levels, breaking from the traditional hierarchical structure (Burg, 2016). Burg outlines what can happen when a public media station undergoes a drastic change in culture and a conscious adaptation from traditional broadcast media to new media. Using design thinking as a station-wide framework can affect how content is created by focusing on users. KQED could serve as an example of how design thinking and transmedia could be implemented at WFYI, possibly starting with the Eugene Debs project.

Heather Chaplin describes how design thinking can be used to improve journalism by applying a more user-centered approach. Yet, she warns that following design thinking structure to the letter may be limiting for journalism, and that the industry must instead follow eight general tenets of design thinking (Chaplin, 2016).

1. Journalists must understand how their stories fit into the larger world.
2. Remove the focus from technology and place it on people, resisting the need to use the latest and greatest technology just for the sake of using it.
3. Clarify what the problem is before trying to solve it.
4. Use empathy research to truly learn about users' lives in order to report on what matters.
5. Generate ideas through ideation.
6. After ideation, construct and clarify coherent ideas.
7. Integrate prototyping in order to move from ideas to real solutions.
8. Test the prototype and observe the possible solution being used by actual users.

These steps not only follow design thinking, but also allow resources to be invested in actual problems, enable the media company to interact with the audience, follow a framework in

which stories are threads to a larger, system-wide story, and move toward community-led journalism (Chaplin, 2016). Chaplin outlines a company-wide approach that would be helpful for WFYI and clearly articulates how design thinking can improve not only internal functions but external relationships with the audience. This report could serve as a useful tool for educating staff as to why design thinking is beneficial.

An article in the public broadcasting publication *Current* describes PRX's Project Catapult, a Corporation-for-Public-Broadcasting-funded workshop that taught radio personnel how to create podcasts informed by design thinking (Lloyd et al, 2018). The participants were able to incorporate this strategy into their storytelling and focused on empathy research in order to decide who the audience was and what stories would best serve their needs. It also changed the way the producers worked, as ideation and quick prototyping allowed them to test ideas early in the process instead of waiting until the final edit. Design thinking with the audience in mind also allowed the creators to think about the differences in broadcasting compared to narrowcasting to their target audience. Podcasts allow flexibility in length and structure in order to best meet the needs of a story and audience as opposed to standardized formats for broadcasting. This audience specificity allows for a deeper, reciprocal relationship with the creators. Finally, design thinking allows for experimentation, since ideas can quickly be tried, tested, and adapted along the way and allows structures to go beyond the "tried and true" into something experimental and audience-driven (Lloyd et al, 2018).

Like design thinking, transmedia storytelling is still a somewhat foreign concept at public broadcasting stations, which typically produce news and documentary-style media. In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins (2006) introduces the reader

to the world of transmedia storytelling, which emerges and intersects on various platforms. Sometimes this is intentionally designed and strategically released by media companies that are looking to expand audiences and increase engagement. Transmedia storytelling can also create connections organically and driven by the users who consume the story and then begin to create and construct parts of the story world themselves. Ideally, this can happen in combination, when the blurring of the lines between consumer and creator and the ambiguity of ownership of intellectual property creates an interesting dynamic and circuit of creation (Jenkins, 2006).

The author's example of *The Matrix* universe shows how creating stand-alone but interlocking stories on different platforms, and purposefully engaging audiences allows users to get as much interaction from the experience as they want. It also gives content creators the opportunity to fully engage with a deeply interested and therefore ambassadorial audience. By spreading the story across several platforms, including three films, an animated series, video games, web comics, and various forms of online engagement including discussion boards, each chapter of *The Matrix* storyworld is suited to the medium on which it is told. Some users may be interested in the video game, but not the comic, but are still drawn in from the platform that is appealing to them. Deeply engaged users will follow the story from the comic to the movie and through the video game, and so on. This advantage of "meeting people where they are" and drawing them in is a cornerstone of transmedia design (Jenkins, 2006).

Because the author stresses the importance of creating a rich storyworld, it may seem impossible to "create" a non-fiction equivalent, as the parameters cannot be changed when telling a story journalistically. However, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the way imaginary storyworlds are constructed. WFYI should try to think outside of the usual public

media “boxes,” and borrow from fiction in order to draw out the life and times of Eugene Debs in the early twentieth century. The real world can be just as intriguing as fantasy. WFYI may just ask “Who is Eugene Debs?” just as the Wachowski brothers asked “What is the Matrix?”

Jenkins (2016) expands upon his definition of transmedia storytelling in an article titled *Transmedia What?* saying that it isn’t a noun, but an adjective that can be applied to different situations, including non-fiction storytelling. He reiterates it is not cross-platform or multimedia. Instead, transmedia storytelling carries intersecting pieces of the storyworld across different media instead of merely regurgitating the same story in different places. He recommends that documentary producers use existing media forms, such as podcasts and internet videos in order to efficiently tell the story. And just because it is non-fiction doesn’t mean that world building is impossible. Documentarians can instead use the existing world and create intersections between influential people, places, and events in order to give the story context, structure, and interest. These threads can present competing points of view that engage the viewer and encourage submitting their own opinions and experiences (Jenkins, 2016).

Yet non-fiction transmedia in public broadcasting isn’t entirely new. *Half the Sky* is a transmedia experience highlighting women’s inequality issues, centered around a book that expanded into a four-hour documentary airing on PBS (Astle, 2012). It included live social media engagement during the broadcast, web videos, music downloads, online games, and more. One unique aspect of this project was its ability to serve both an audience interested in helping at-risk women, and the at-risk women themselves, as different components served different groups. The structure of this project allows users to focus on a specific issue, such as education, or expand into all the issues presented. This design enables it to reach a variety of audiences at

different levels of engagement. The creators also stressed the importance of finding audiences that would normally not watch PBS in places where they usually consume media, like Facebook (Astle, 2012). This is a fascinating approach, and it is something that would be transferable to the Eugene Debs project. For example, stakeholders in Debs' hometown of Terre Haute may have different interests and needs than a wider, regional audience, and parts of the storyworld can be designed to reach this specific group.

Independent Lens' documentary *Black Panthers* is another PBS transmedia success story. PBS spent a year promoting the program and collaborated with influential organizations in the African-American community in a designed "audience-engagement strategy" (Schneider, 2016). As a result, *Black Panthers* received the highest ratings of any *Independent Lens* program. Several influential celebrities and black millennials engaged in discussion about the documentary on social media (Schneider, 2016). The series also used Kickstarter to raise funds for a theatrical release. In addition to generating the money needed for the event, it brought together a community of interested individuals and organizations, which in turn promoted the documentary. For the show's formal marketing campaign, creators decided to forego traditional broadcast strategies in favor of a targeted approach with black communities, influencers, and publications (Schneider, 2016). While this campaign was impressive because it brought atypical audiences to PBS, this focused approach could also be beneficial to the Eugene Debs project. Many of the network's viewers are older, white males, already interested in history, but a younger and more diverse demographic could be a good target for this transmedia experience (Sefton, 2017).

Project Design

This project was driven by a single guiding question: How might WFYI design its own audience-engagement strategy around the video documentary *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs*? To address this question, this project used design thinking and transmedia storytelling to tell the story of Eugene Debs and aims to explore the different media, storytelling techniques, and platforms with which they already engage. By allowing users to generate ideas for transmedia elements *themselves* using design thinking, the station can tap into the desires of an audience of devoted viewers, listeners, and members. The station can then use the innovative ideas generated with design thinking and expand to new audiences who are not familiar with WFYI as well. Design thinking allows media consumers to participate in the design process and enables “high-impact solutions to bubble up from below rather than being imposed from the top” (Brown & Wyatt, 2010).

Participant Recruitment

Using this philosophy to create the transmedia story elements for *The Revolutionist*, I recruited two groups to participate in multiple design thinking sessions: a committee of employees who are also avid WFYI consumers and a group of young professional public media enthusiasts called The WFYI Nerds. The first group consisted of seven WFYI employees from departments outside of video production, including marketing, social media, radio, community engagement, events, and development. These individuals are typically responsible for creating content and promoting WFYI’s mission. They are highly engaged users of public media, but previously have not had a major role associated with a video documentary. These seven employees were invited via email to join a transmedia committee and attended five hour-long

meetings where design thinking sessions helped create and refine transmedia story elements about Eugene Debs.

A second group consisting of four members of “WFYI Nerds,” the station’s group of young professional audience members interested in public media, also participated in design thinking sessions. This group is highly engaged with station events and are seen as ambassadors of the brand but have not been asked to develop content in the past. Members of this group were recruited through a direct message to the WFYI Nerds email list inviting them to join a brainstorming session in order to design an event about Eugene Debs for young professionals. Invitees who were interested were invited to use a Doodle poll to select a meeting date. Once the meeting date was chosen, 10 participants responded saying they would attend. On the day of the meeting, four participants actually attended.

Design Thinking and Other Methods

In order to explore what audiences WFYI is trying to reach with the Eugene Debs transmedia experience, committee members created audience persona profiles. These sketches are derived from research and give content creators a way to visualize the audience they are serving for each medium (Luma Institute, 2012). Using recent PBS audience research and each employee’s experience with local audiences, we created personas for television, radio, website, and social media audiences. Each persona included age, education, political affiliation, and needs and wants. Using these profiles, the whole group quickly brainstormed different ways to engage those specific audiences with the important issues of Eugene Debs’ life as identified in the first activity. The responses were grouped and discussed, and the group voted on their favorite ideas.

Participants then chose an idea their department could focus on and created storyboards or descriptions of how their ideas would work. Storyboarding allowed participants to visualize their concept and also helped the rest of the group understand the idea (Luma, 2012). The group started to imagine how these ideas could be implemented within WFYI's structure and associated with other existing projects. Other low-fidelity prototypes in the form of scripts and grant proposals allowed participants to describe their ideas in detailed language. We continued to develop these ideas, and started to imagine how they could fit together in a transmedia storyworld.

Finally we tested the low-fidelity prototypes. For example, we created various elements for a social media campaign and then had a critique session where committee members could voice their concerns about the concept. The critique followed a recommended design thinking structure so that feedback was constructive and allowed us to move forward with a social media campaign better suited for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Luma, 2012)

We also implemented design thinking into a single session with the WFYI Nerds group. Using the following "statement starters" participants were asked to brainstorm about the following questions in succession:

1. "How might we improve the Nerds experience?"
2. How might Nerds engage with local content?
3. Why should we care about Eugene Debs?
4. How might the Nerds design an event around Eugene Debs?

Using the saturate and group method, participants rapidly iterated ideas and then they were collected, discussed, and grouped for similarities. At the end of the session, participants voted for their favorite ideas for each question using the “Visualize the Vote” method (Luma, 2012).

Analysis and Creation

The WFYI design thinking sessions produced a lot of information. From dozens of ideas, WFYI committee members voted for the transmedia pieces they thought would work best in the current WFYI work environment and with the constraints of time and budget. These ideas were then compiled into a list of 11 transmedia story elements that will be created and administered by the committee. The ideas that WFYI Nerds voted as their favorites were then presented to the WFYI committee to determine their feasibility. The committee selected an idea for an event which will then be given back to the WFYI Nerds for further design thinking and prototyping.

Representation of the Project

Using the ideas generated by design thinking, the internal committee of WFYI employees and the participants from WFYI Nerds created a series of designs for transmedia elements to build the storyworld of Eugene Debs and educate people about his life. However, the *Notable Hoosiers* series and the documentary itself were created because WFYI partnered with outside organizations which provided funding. This combination of design thinking and traditional methods resulted in eleven unique plans for events and media campaigns that will inform and entertain users across platforms.

Element 1: Wine Fest Booth

WFYI's event coordinator, who is a committee member, presented the idea of a booth at the WFYI Wine Fest fundraiser for *The Revolutionist* early in the design thinking process. Wine Fest is an annual event that attracts a diverse crowd of public media fans, but also wine enthusiasts who know little about WFYI. The event coordinator had been looking for ways to engage guests with WFYI content. The event was held from 6 to 9 p.m., March 1, 2019, at the Biltwell Event Center near downtown Indianapolis. To prepare for the event, it was necessary to finalize a title for the documentary and design a graphic look and logo. WFYI's graphic designer created a large poster to catch guests' attention and also designed a postcard to hand out to guests. The poster displayed a photograph of Eugene Debs along with one of his most recognizable quotes: "While there is a lower class, I am in it, while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free."



Figure 1: Elements of The Revolutionist booth at Wine Fest. Elements include Eugene beer samples, campaign buttons, postcards, tote bags, monitor playing film trailer, and cutout of Eugene Debs.

The front of the postcard had the same design as the poster, and the back had information about Eugene Debs life. Additionally, the graphic designer created a life-size cutout of Eugene Debs so people could interact with the display. The booth also had a small monitor that played a 90-second trailer of the documentary with captions so people could get the information in the

loud space. On the table of the booth, there were replica buttons from Eugene Debs presidential campaign for guests to take with them. There were also a limited number of tote bags with *The Revolutionist* logo that participants could win if they answered a trivia question about Eugene Debs. Finally, in order to further attract participants to the booth, we poured *Eugene*, a porter beer from Revolution Brewing in Chicago with an image of Eugene Debs on the can.

Element 2: *Side Effects* Event during *Spirit and Place*

Side Effects Public media is a public health reporting collaborative comprised of several public radio stations throughout the midwest. Side Effects' community outreach coordinator is part of the Eugene Debs committee and wanted to find a way to address current healthcare issues by comparing them to those during Eugene Debs life 100 years ago. She thought it would be helpful to create a program as part of *Spirit and Place*, an annual festival in Indianapolis that combines events around the city under a common theme. The theme for 2019 is "R/Evolution" and the festival's website asks the questions: "What do history, geography, art, science, astronomy, sociology, religion, political science, and culture teach us about revolution and evolution? What contemporary issues, in our backyard and elsewhere, are calling out for revolution?" (spiritandplace.org). *The Revolutionist* fits the 2019 theme perfectly and *Spirit and Place* also has an enthusiastic, loyal audience. She thought it would provide a unique opportunity to talk about the life and times of Eugene Debs, the struggle of the working class to live healthy lives, and the current struggle for access to healthcare.

To bring the past and present together, we met with the Medical History Museum in Indianapolis to form a partnership for the event. This organization is seeking to "humanize" its collection of medical artifacts and specimens in their collection. They were excited about the

idea of partnering for the event, and offered up their operating theatre that was used by medical students in the early twentieth century. The space embodies the perfect era and atmosphere for a discussion about the evolution of healthcare since the time of Eugene Debs (*Figure 2*).



Figure 2: Location for *Spirit and Place* event at the Medical History Museum in Indianapolis. This room was used as an operating theatre for medical students from 1896 to 1969.

During this meeting, we designed the program for the *Spirit and Place* festival.

Participants watch a short video about healthcare during the time of Eugene Debs and then a panel of experts lead a discussion about healthcare then and now. The moderator is one of the producers of *The Revolutionist* and the panel consists of a historian with expertise about the time period of Eugene Debs' life (The Gilded Age) and an expert who can talk about healthcare challenges today. The event is planned to take place at the Medical History Museum on November 7, 2019 at 6 p.m.

Element 3: *Simple Civics* Web Series

Another committee member, WFYI's social media manager, suggested creating a web series of two minute videos about politics and government to be distributed through social media

called *Simple Civics*. For *The Revolutionist* project, we would launch the series with episodes devoted to Eugene Debs topics: “Socialism vs. Communism?” and “The History of the Third Party Politics” (*Appendix*). The format would consist of a host filmed in front of a green screen simply explaining the topic. The background could change according to the topic and images could be edited in to further illustrate the content. We plan to collaborate with an expert from a local university who will serve as a host and content researcher. The social media manager has written preliminary scripts and filming will begin in the summer of 2019. The first two episodes will be released in the weeks leading up to the broadcast premiere of *The Revolutionist* on October 3, 2019.

Element 4: *Notable Hoosiers* Television Series

Another committee member, WFYI’s director of development, proposed re-broadcasting past WFYI documentaries about prominent figures from Indiana in the weeks leading up to the on-air premiere of *The Revolutionist*. This series, marketed as *Notable Hoosiers*, includes five programs created by WFYI over the past decade and documentaries about Senator Richard Lugar, author Kurt Vonnegut, Governor Edgar Whitcomb, President Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis Mayor Bill Hudnut, and Holocaust survivor Eva Kors. Sponsorship for this series is sold to generate additional money for WFYI. The programs will air every Thursday in order to promote the last installment of the series, which is the premiere of *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs*, on Thursday, October 3, 2019.

Element 5: *Cultural Manifesto* Radio Program

WFYI's Radio Station Manager, a committee member, introduced the idea of dedicating an episode of *Cultural Manifesto*, a popular WFYI radio program about music history, to Eugene Debs. The host and producer of this program loved the concept. Being a fan of Eugene Debs, he suggested many ideas of how to devote an episode to labor music. He wants to invite an Indianapolis performer who raps about current labor issues to be a guest on the show and will include some historical and somewhat obscure songs about labor issues to teach people how this music developed. This episode will air in September 2019 to coincide with Labor Day.

Element 6: Radio News Segments

WFYI's radio station manager also thought it would be possible to include short radio news packages about Eugene Debs in the morning and evening drive time blocks of programming during the week of the broadcast premiere. She put me in contact with the host of the evening block of radio programming. He had created stories related to WFYI's television documentary *Eva: A7063* (a program about holocaust survivor Eva Kors and her campaign for forgiveness), in the days leading up to its broadcast in Fall 2018. He is on board to do something similar for *The Revolutionist* and suggested several story ideas. Because the documentary premieres on a Thursday, we plan to produce four stories to air Monday through Thursday of that week. The series will include stories about Eugene Debs' house in Terre Haute, Indiana, the Pullman factory National Landmark in Chicago, the history of Socialism in the United States, and a segment about Eugene Debs' trial in Cleveland.

Element 7: Online Quiz about the Election of 1912

During our committee meetings, several members mentioned a popular quiz that NPR presented during the 2016 primary election that let users decide who they should vote for based on their beliefs. WFYI's Web Content Producer, a committee member, suggested that we do something similar for this project, and when we talked about the significance of the 1912 election, it seemed like a perfect fit. In 1912, four candidates ran for president in the United States: Eugene Debs, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson. Not only were there four big name historical figures in the race, but it was an interesting election because there were four major parties, and the influence of socialism and labor unions had shifted candidates considerably to the left. It was also a relatively strong showing for Eugene Debs, who received six percent of the vote. In order to write the questions for the WFYI quiz, we will collaborate with a historian with expertise in the time period. Users will answer a series of questions to choose their preferences on issues such as women's suffrage, the environment, workers rights, monopolies, and immigration. They will also be asked about candidates' personalities and traits they prefer. At the end of the quiz, it will be revealed who they would have voted for in the 1912 election. Users will also be able to read more about the other candidates and how this election affected history, and will be able to easily share it through social media. This quiz will be released through Facebook in September 2019.

Element 8: WFYI Nerds Event

Four people participated in a WFYI Nerds event design thinking session. Participants proposed several ideas for a Nerds event associated with *The Revolutionist*. Of those ideas, I presented the ones they voted as favorites to the WFYI committee (*Figure 3*).

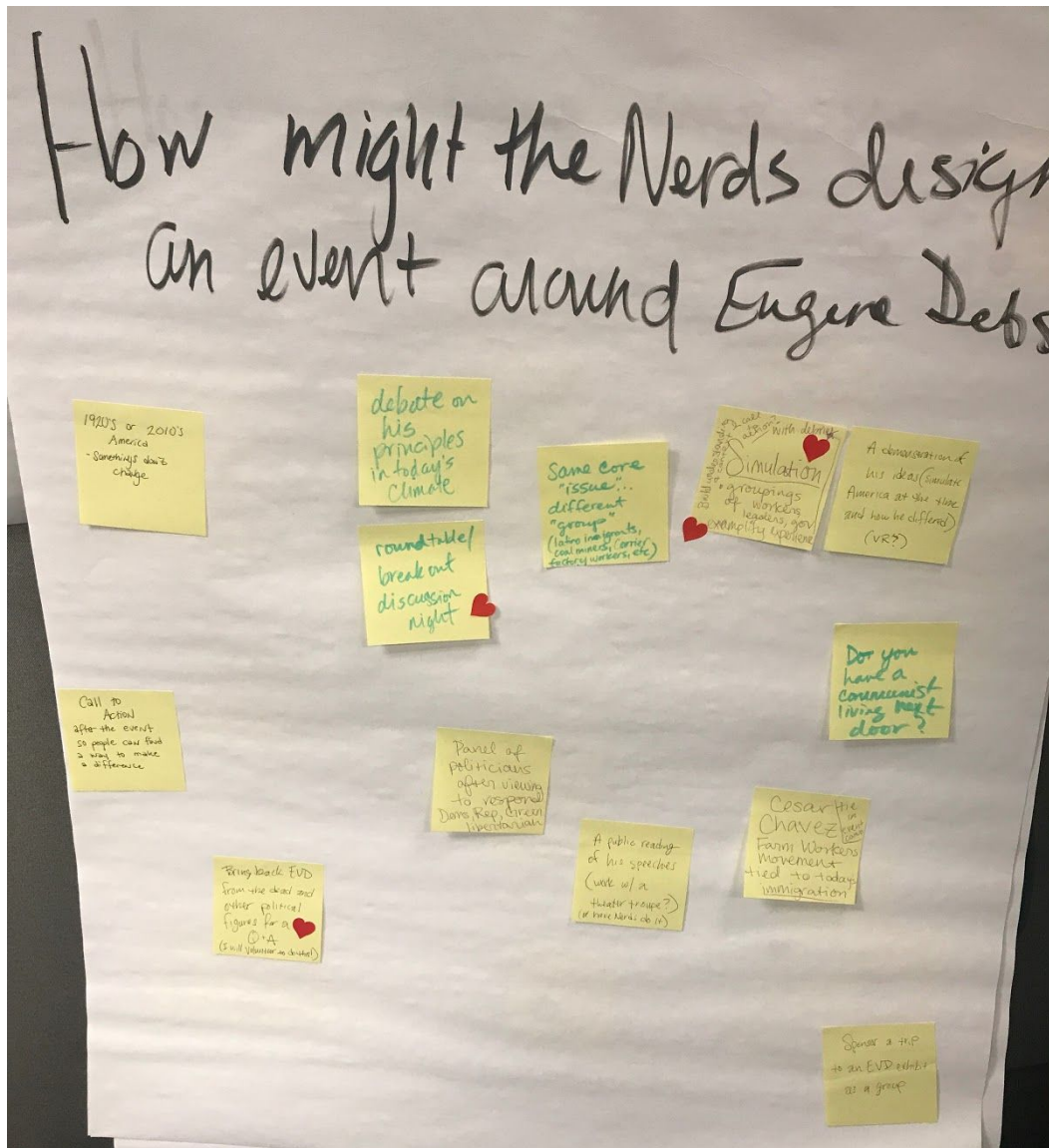


Figure 3: Design thinking results from WFYI Nerds meeting. Participants were asked how they could design an event around the topic of Eugene Debs. They brainstormed several ideas and voted for their favorites with heart stickers.

The committee brainstormed which ideas were most feasible and voted on a Gilded Age simulation. Participants will get into groups and have roles as Eugene Debs, Andrew Carnegie, a male steel mill worker, a female garment worker, and other people who lived during the early twentieth century. Through the simulation, they will be presented with challenges and make

decisions based on the resources available to them. After the simulation, there will be a group discussion. Committee members who had participated in similar simulations said that we could borrow from those programs. It was also suggested that this event be held in November to allow for more station capacity, keep the momentum of the documentary going, and to prevent oversaturation in September and October. The documentary co-producer, Kim Jacobs, suggested that the simulation focus on the Pullman strike of 1894 and participants could take the roles of different workers at the Pullman company.

Element 9: *The Revolutionist* Web Page

In committee meetings, WFYI's Web Content Producer suggested that there be a digital space for the various transmedia elements and suggested a web page on WFYI's website. He recommended a webpage on WFYI.org instead of a stand-alone website for its ease of creation and upkeep, but also because WFYI users who use WFYI.org anyway won't have to leave the site. This webpage will contain all videos related to *The Revolutionist* including trailers, extra content, and the documentary itself as YouTube embedded players. The website will also have links to the online quiz, episode of *Cultural Manifesto*, radio news stories, *Simple Civics* series, and news about upcoming events including the *Spirit and Place* event, WFYI Nerds event, and screening opportunities.

Element 10: #DoYouKnowDebs Social Media Campaign



Figure 4: Three examples of possible social media campaigns. The committee ultimately chose #doyouknowdebs.

The early stages of social media, transmedia storytelling will carry the theme and hashtag #DoYouKnowDebs. During the design thinking processes, various presentations, and informal interviews, when asked, the majority of people I talked to did not know Eugene Debs. We created this campaign to demonstrate that while today he has low name recognition, in his era, he was both famous and infamous, respected and hated (Figure 4). Social media posts will present strong, often contradictory opinions about Eugene Debs from well-known sources such as Theodore Roosevelt, Helen Keller, Woodrow Wilson, and Clarence Darrow. This juxtaposition will not only inform people about the importance of this figure and give them a general sense of his story's time and place in history, it will also pique the interest of those who know nothing about him.

Element 11: The Revolutionist Documentary Video

The core piece of this transmedia project is an hour long documentary that will air locally on WFYI on October 3, 2019 called *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs*. It illustrates the life of Eugene V. Debs, born on November 5, 1855 in Terre Haute, Indiana. He started work on the

railroads at the age of 14, and went on to lead the American Railroad Union in a transformative nationwide strike against the Pullman Company in 1894. This conflict involved more than a quarter million railroad workers, stopped the U.S. mail and passenger service, and was ended in violence when President Cleveland called in the national guard. Debs became both famous and infamous, and while jailed for the strike, began to see socialism as the way to fair treatment of workers. He helped found the Socialist Party and ran for president on its ticket five times. He was a renowned orator and toured the U.S. delivering his message of equality and workers' rights to huge crowds. In 1918, while speaking out against U.S. involvement in World War One, he was arrested for violating the Espionage Act and was sentenced to ten years in a federal penitentiary. From there, he ran for president a final time and won almost one million votes. This documentary's goal is to inform and educate people about this influential American and encourage them to think about historic issues in their current iterations. As this is the most in depth piece of the transmedia storyworld, it will serve as the centerpiece and other threads of the story will reference and promote it. This program will also be streamed on the project's webpage, WFYI's YouTube channel, and has the potential to be distributed nationally through American Public Television (*Figure 5*).



Figure 5: Screen captures from the documentary *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs*. The interview on the left is with historian Ernest Freeberg and on the right is biographer Nick Salvatore. The center image is Eugene Debs circa 1918.

Discussion

The WFYI committee and the WFYI Nerds group generated dozens of ideas through design thinking. From those exercises, we narrowed the ideas down to 11 executable pieces of the transmedia storyworld. At the writing of this paper, one piece is complete and ten pieces are in different stages of production. There is a plan in place for the release of these elements during the months of August through November 2019. Each committee member will complete individual tasks that will lead to project completion (*Figure 6*).

Ownership Key		Kyle Travers	Scott McAlister	Roxanna Caldwell	Stacey Stutville	Doug Juggers	Taylor Leonard	Rubin Rocks	Ephie Riche						
		May		June		July		August		September		October		November	
Digital Content and Social Media	Simple Civics: Search for professor host at Butler University			Simple Civics: Meet with possible host	Simple Civics: Schedule production					Simple Civics: Release 9/17, 9/24		Simple Civics: Release 10/1, 10/8	Simple Civics: Release 10/15, 10/22	Simple Civics: Release 10/29, 11/5	
	Simple Civics: Search for professor host at IUPLI			Simple Civics: Finalize Scripts		Simple Civics: Studio Production		Simple Civics: Post-production							
	Social Media: Create Instagram graphics/gifs and downloadable assets with Jodi			Webpage: Create The Revolutionist webpage on WFYI.org											
	Election Quiz: Write election quiz questions; send to Doug for design and historian for accuracy			Election Quiz: Finalize election quiz content so it can be developed		Election Quiz: Develop election quiz				Election Quiz: Test Election Quiz	Election Quiz: Release Election Quiz				
Radio Content and Promotion				Hashtag: Decide on hashtag and develop plan on how to use it							Countdown: Countdown for social media, released everyday 10 days before October 3				
				Social Media Post: BTS post for social media—Shoot in Minneapolis with Dr. Jones		Social Media Post: BTS post for social media—Shoot at Debs House in Terre Haute		Social Media Post: BTS post for social media—Recording with Danny Glover		Social Media Post: BTS post for social media—Premiere in Terre Haute	Social Media Post: BTS post for social media—TBD				
										Cultural Manifesto: Release "Labor" episode around Labor Day (Kyle Lora)					
											Crossroads: Episode about The Revolutionist and Socialism (new producer)		Curious Mix: Segment about Eugene Debs museum (Jill Dibrine)		
Television Content and Promotion										Radio News: Produce 4 Debs stories (Matt Pelsor)	Radio News: Release 4 Debs stories in first week of October (Matt Pelsor)				
				TV Promo: Create .30 TV promo and give to Myke, Scott, Doug for air, social, and website				TV Promo: Place promo around Notable Hoosiers (Myke Perrey)					Documentary: Airt Oct. 3		
								TV Promo: Place promo around Country Music (Myke Perrey)		TV Promo: Place promo around American Masters, Antiques Roadshow, and other history programming (Myke Perrey)					
Additional Marketing						Member Magazine: Create ad for screening event in Terre Haute (August Mag)		Member Magazine: Create ad for The Revolutionist: Eugene Debs (September Mag)		Member Magazine: Cover and story (October Mag)	Member Magazine: Ad for Spirit and Place event (October Mag)				
										Digital Ads: Place ad on website side column and as header on TV schedule page					
Events										Listen Up: Preshow about The Revolutionist at Jad Abumrad event on September 19					
										Screening Event: Premiere in Terre Haute September 27 on ISU Campus					
													Spirit and Place: Side Effects event at Medical History Museum November 7		
													WFYI Nerds: Possible simulation event		

Figure 6: Content production and release schedule. Each member of the committee was given color-coded tasks to create the transmedia element in their area of expertise.

Although it is not yet possible to tell the impact most of these elements will have on viewership of the broadcast documentary or total engagement with the subject of Eugene Debs,

early evidence points toward a positive result. There are plenty of anecdotal data that have led me to believe that producing media with a design thinking and transmedia approach will be beneficial for content creators, our audiences, and WFYI as an organization.

In general, most people with whom I've spoken do not know who Eugene Debs was. At the Wine Fest event, I was able to interact with dozens of people and talked to them about his life. Even more surprisingly, many guests seemed surprised that WFYI was producing the documentary, and some did not seem to know what the organization created local content. This person-to-person interaction increased knowledge of WFYI's mission and hopefully made a lasting impression on those we spoke to. This event took place in March, a full nine months before the release of the documentary. This was also true for the WFYI Nerds brainstorming session. The women who participated did not seem to know much about Eugene Debs, but by the end of the evening, had a broader understanding of his influence and how it could be applied to current issues.

Internally, the creation of the transmedia committee for the Eugene Debs project and our monthly meetings has increased awareness within the organization. Most members of the committee had no idea who Eugene Debs was when they started, but as we create transmedia story elements, their knowledge is increasing and so is their capacity to share their knowledge with others. Also, because committee members come from almost all departments within WFYI, they are able to act as ambassadors for the project and spread the word to other employees in their department.

Design thinking allowed committee members to create transmedia with a sense of ownership, and they were not assigned pieces of the transmedia story. In their day-to-day jobs,

many employees are handed a task, and can only be creative in *how* they handle the problem. This project offered more freedom. Instead, they brainstormed, discussed, and tailored their ideas to match their department's resources and expertise. I do not have the knowledge of marketing, events, community engagement, and radio production that my committee members do. As experts in their fields, they were able to take the story of the documentary and craft it to the channel through which their piece of transmedia is told. This also allows for a division of labor that will be helpful as I finish production of the television documentary. As I am crafting in my area of expertise, I can rest assured that transmedia elements are being created and executed by the experts of each channel.

Design thinking also led to increased engagement with WFYI Nerds. By beginning the session with broad questions about what they would like out of the Nerds experience, participants really shed light on what is working and also how Nerds could expand. They expressed a desire to see a more diverse group participate at Nerds events, and even said that more men should get involved. They also said that they would like more volunteer opportunities to do good in the community and also opportunities to volunteer with WFYI. The Nerds responses also showed that they were not familiar with WFYI local productions, especially from the television department. Yet when asked how they would like to get involved with the organization, they said they were very curious about seeing how local productions are put together and even suggested that the Nerds take a "field trip" on an upcoming shoot for a local production. When asked specifically how the group could engage with the subject of Eugene Debs, they suggested having a roundtable discussion around issues of socialism, freedom of speech, and workers' rights. They also enjoyed the idea of simulations, and thought it would be

informative if an upcoming event would allow users to see what life was like in different classes and occupations during the Gilded Age.

This project also came at a very beneficial time for WFYI. PBS stations around the country are being encouraged to emphasize audience engagement and digital content through a program called the “Digital Immersion Project.” At WFYI, this has led to the creation of an internal committee known as “Wires and Waves,” a group of employees from all departments who are charged with implementing a digital culture by “aligning content to our audience at the right time, on the right platform, in a way that matches our station goals,” through a “solid multi-platform strategy to create meaningful content, distribute it intentionally, and effectively engage desired audiences” (WFYI Internal Communication, 2018). I am on this committee, and so far, it has largely addressed the issue based on past experience and broad, general looks at future projects. *The Revolutionist* has provided a tangible, current project that can be used as an experiment for these ideas. Many of the members of Wires and Waves also belong to the transmedia committee and have been able to put into practice the ideas of brainstorming, audience segmentation, strategic release of multi-platform media, and measuring success through audience data. It is too early to say if *The Revolutionist* will be a total success on all fronts, but it has afforded WFYI the opportunity to try new things. The idea for the web series, *Simple Civics*, has been on our social media coordinator’s mind for some time, yet he didn’t know how to get started. By using *The Revolutionist* project as a catalyst, we will create episodes related to Eugene Debs in the weeks leading up to the broadcast premiere, but we will also use this momentum to continue the series with episodes on other subjects. This project gave us the excuse to try something that will last beyond *The Revolutionist*.

It is my hope that *The Revolutionist* transmedia project will stand as an example of what PBS stations can do. Other stations will see that with a little planning and investment, a documentary project can live beyond the broadcast and reach audiences who would have never tuned in. In the future, I would focus more on how the transmedia pieces fit together and lead users from one to another. This may be easier on a fictional piece or a broader subject, but hopefully covering different aspects of Eugene Debs' life in different ways will translate into a variety of experiences for those who do follow every piece of the transmedia story. It would have also been beneficial to engage with other local media outlets, like newspapers, and with audiences who do not already engage with WFYI in order to get some fresh perspectives and have an even wider reach. But with the obstacle of Eugene Debs' obscurity, educating people about WFYI, Eugene Debs, and the other pieces of transmedia seemed daunting. I determined that internal, organizational buy-in was just as important, if not more so, in what seems to be our station's maiden voyage into design thinking and transmedia storytelling.

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Appendix

Sample script from *Simple Civics* web series.

Video	Audio
Host is on screen. A picture of a car appears over one shoulder when he says “car.” The same photo appears over the other shoulder when he says “automobile.”	Host: Some words are interchangeable. Like car and automobile.
Cars disappear, and several different words related to socialism on screen: socialism, communism, Marxism, social democracy, democratic socialism, etc.	Host: And yet there are other words that we think are interchangeable that shouldn’t be. And that’s important, because if we’re going to understand different points of view we need to know what they’re talking about.
Animated title “Simple Civics.”	Host: Simple Civics. Or No VO and just play music over animation
Host is on screen with same words over him. One by one host pops them until Socialism and Communism remain.	Host: In the spirit of the show, let’s just stick with the differences between socialism and communism.
A tree is shown on screen with socialism written at its base.	Host: It’s not surprising that people use the terms interchangeably. Communism, after all is a branch of socialism, just one of the ways the theory has grown.
Zoom into the base of the tree, where “Socialism” is. Underneath the word we see a bunch of stick figures jumping up and down in celebration.	Host: At its most simplified, socialism is a theory how to organize society that says that collective cooperation makes for better government and economies.

<p>“Capitalism” replaces “socialism” on the tree. single stick figures appear over various symbols of industry with lines connecting the industry with the individual. The individual stick figures erase. “Socialism” replaces “capitalism.” A state capital rotunda appears, with lines connecting each industry up to the rotunda.</p>	<p>Host: Whereas capitalism places the means of production, distribution and so on in the hands of individuals, socialism calls for those means to be placed in the hands of the collective community, usually through the state.</p>
<p>Host is standing next to the tree. When talking about healthcare, a doctor comes on screen and hands him a bill. The host crumples it up and tosses it away.</p>	<p>Host: As a theory, and I’m stressing the word “theory,” socialism is great. Everyone pitches in, and they reap the benefits of their hard work along with the rest of the community. If you go to the hospital for some reason, you don’t get stuck with a massive medical bill because you’d already paid into the system that kept you healthy. As a practice, though, it gets little messier.</p>
<p>Possible bit about Venezuela</p>	<p>Possible bit about Venezuela – about how storing the state being in control on behalf of the people can leave it open for corruption.</p>
<p>Zoom into a branch on the tree labeled “Communism”</p>	<p>Host: One of the more famous systems of socialism in action is communism. It’s still founded on the basis of collective cooperation, but it goes further to say that the cooperation should be run by a totalitarian government made up of one and only one government.</p>
<p>Under the communism label, we see stick figures speaking out against the state and being taken away by police. Then, a stick figure tries to use a computer but is unable to.</p>	<p>Host: What you see often in communism is a tamping down of free thought and expression. Famously, in the USSR, artists, authors, intellectuals and more were slaughtered or exiled because their ideas went against the state. Today, communist countries like China heavily limit the use of</p>

	the internet in an attempt to limit free thought.
Zoom out to standing in front of tree	Host: So you can see why people use the two terms interchangeably. Communism takes the solid base of socialism to greater heights, which unfortunately can lead to some negative results. Because they're so closely linked, it's understandable many people fear socialism, but still many politicians believe socialism has a place in our capitalist, constitutional republic. Can we really take the best of both worlds? That's next time on Simple Civics.
Closing graphic with credits	Simple Civics music